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Using thematic analysis, explore, through the viewpoint of homeless sector workers, whether the homeless population are receiving adequate help.

Danica Muckleston

Supervised by: Dr. Leanne Rimmer

April 2019

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores whether the homeless population receive adequate help through the viewpoint of individuals working in the homeless sector. Previous literature indicates England does not produce significant internal studies and evaluations with regards to tackling homelessness, alongside a literature gap concerning sector workers on the front line, providing the service, not discussing and interpreting their daily interactions with the homeless. This forms the argument that true implementation effects may only be known through the viewpoint of sector workers, whilst this research attempts to fill the literature gap to possibly arrive to new conclusions to tackle homelessness. This formed 3 research aims: are the current policies and legislation working sufficiently, alongside how to reduce and prevent homelessness. Using a qualitative approach, a sample of 4 homeless sector workers produced raw data through 1-hour semi-structured interviews which were analysed using thematic analysis. These findings answered all research aims and indicated that current government policies and legislation are failing; self-recognition that one is vulnerable to homelessness can significantly influence outcomes and providing connected services could dramatically influence homelessness. In conclusion, the homeless population do not currently receive adequate help, but the potential is there.

<b>KEY WORDS:</b>	<b>HOMELESS</b>	<b>SECTOR WORKERS</b>	<b>POLICY</b>	<b>LEGISLATION</b>	<b>THEMATIC ANALYSIS</b>
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## **Introduction**

Homelessness across England has become an increasingly prominent social issue and is also recognised as an international one (Limebury and Shea, 2015); yet, currently there is no internationally agreed upon definition of what delineates being homeless (Fowler, 2019). Although many different definitions have been provided (Donley, 2008), they are often formed directly relating to the objectives and ethos of the body defining it - meaning all definitions become relative and varied (Ravenhill, 2003). This lack of an agreed upon comprehensive definition forms an obstruction to measuring the phenomenon (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000), precluding action on tackling and preventing homelessness (Ravenhill, 2003). Notwithstanding, employing Shelter's (2018) definition, someone is classed as homeless if: residing with friends or family, squatting, living in a hostel, B&B or night shelter, at risk of violence within their home or their living environments are deprived and affecting their health. Individuals become homeless for a variety of reasons, including: separation from partner, disasters like fires or floods, being evicted, or domestic abuse and violence (Shelter, 2018). Furthermore, the homeless population hold wide intragroup variations. Their demographics comprise men, women and children of all age cohorts and of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Donley, 2008), with fluctuation in time spent being homeless either transitory or long-term (O'Neil et al., 2017). Moreover, homelessness can be visible or hidden, with the latter also lacking an accepted definition (Reeve, 2011). Those suffering from hidden homelessness include 'sofa surfers' with no expectancy of gaining stable tenancy, being in households at risk of violence, and living in overcrowded dwellings (O'Neil et al., 2017) – showing many situations are not visible on the streets nor within official statistics (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018).

The phenomenon is traditionally analysed according to structural or psychological factors. Structural factors look at housing and rent prices, unemployment and high housing demand as influences of homelessness; whereas psychological factors focus on the individual and their adaptation within society (Watson and Austerberry, 1986). However, this divide between structural and individual explanations lost traction and was replaced by a new orthodoxy, claiming neither could fully explain homelessness and that they are interactive factors (Pleace, 2000). Fitzpatrick (2005) stated that structural factors create conditions where homelessness occurs and those suffering individual struggles become more vulnerable to hostile social and economic changes. Nevertheless, Somerville (2013) criticised the new orthodoxy approach, stating there is a lack of conceptualisation of what is structural or individual factors, because issues like poor educational achievement potentially belong to both categories. This emphasises the struggle around measuring homelessness as the definition and analysis method lack coherency - yet, statistics are still published which indicate they are not truly representative.

A specific form of homelessness is rough sleeping (Crisis, no date a), considered the most visible and damaging (Crisis, no date b). Rough sleepers are defined by the government as those bedded in open air and in areas not intended for habitation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2013). Official government figures on rough sleeping in England have increased annually since 2010 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013; 2014) and more

than doubled from 1,768 in 2010 to 4,677 in 2018 (Cromarty et al., 2019). Crisis (2018) warned the true number of rough sleepers is more prodigious than recorded, with their own research finding over 8,000 people rough sleeping across England with an excess of 9,000 sleeping in tents, cars, trains and buses – predicting figures will rise to 15,000 by 2026 if nothing changes (Crisis, 2018). Furthermore, Morse (2017) stated the homeless population has increased by 134% since the Conservative party took power. James Brokenshire, the current Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, has acknowledged that Tory policies might have played a role in the high increase in rough sleeping since 2010 (Marsh, 2018).

Therefore, a possible solution to sufficiently tackle homelessness in England is to gain insight from approaches conducted by other countries where it has successfully been reduced. Internationally, only two European countries have reduced homelessness during the past decade: Finland and Norway (FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2018). In particular, Norway reduced homelessness by 36% between 2013 and 2016 because their approach defined homelessness to be a violation of fundamental rights, tackling it as a housing issue not a social problem stemming from personal issues (FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2018). Although international studies are useful, context differences limit transferability, emphasising the importance of local studies (Teixeria, 2018). However, the UK produce few high-quality evaluations despite a significant amount of resources devoted every year (Teixeria, 2018). This means there are currently no reliable tools to identify what is known to reduce homelessness, because existing evidence is scattered around different databases, websites and journals - forming no quick overview (Teixeria, 2018). Lacking a single resource limits policy makers, researchers and sector workers with access to relevant evidence of successful programmes (White, 2018). The National Audit Office (2017) further criticises the government for its approach because they require councils to develop a homelessness strategy, yet they do not check the content of each strategy nor measure its progress - emphasising the need and importance of internal studies. Another gap within databases surrounding homelessness is how service providers understand and discuss their daily social interactions within its context (McCulloch, 2015). Those working in the homeless sector play a vital role in interpretation and implementation of policies (McCulloch, 2015). Lipsky (1980) proposed those working on 'the front-line' services are 'street-level bureaucrats' and suggests they make policy in two respects; exercising discretion in decisions regarding citizens they interact with, and their individual actions form agency behaviour. They are part of the homeless community and in a position to decide if service users are granted particular resources, because these individuals have the power to signpost and move individuals between services or provide endorsement – meaning sector workers judgements have the power to affect outcomes for the homeless. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000) expanded this, stating they operate at the boundary between citizens and state, shaping definitions through action and norms. Moreover, because sector workers understand homelessness in different ways, they may arrive at different solutions to tackling it (O'Neil et al., 2017), identifying new tactics to best combat homelessness. Unfortunately, those working within the homeless sector cannot alone end homelessness (O'Neil et al., 2017).

Arguably, a leading way to address homelessness is through policy and legislation. The history of policy and legislation surrounding homelessness began when it was recognised as a state policy issue since the 1834 Poor Laws Amendment Act (McCulloch, 2015). The next major change was the 1948 National Assistance Act, which gave assistance to those in urgent need of accommodation but left those without dependent children or vulnerabilities not meeting eligibility criteria (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Noble, 2008). The act was superseded by the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act which acknowledged homelessness was a housing issue, with responsibility for assistance being transferred to local authority housing departments. However, homelessness continued to rise in the 1980's (Wardhaugh, 2000), and it was not until the 2002 Homelessness Act which saw the government encourage local authorities to develop strategies to assess and prevent homelessness. The latest legislation is the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act, which oversees new legal duties placed on local councils to prevent and relieve homelessness at an earlier stage, irrespective of the individuals priority need status, provided they are eligible for assistance. Alongside this, the government have published a Homelessness Code of Guidance (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018) which updates existing guidance surrounding the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act but focuses more on legislation and less on delivering general good practice (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018) – further emphasising the vital interpretive role homeless sector workers provide (McCulloch, 2015). An approach to homelessness reduction is the No Second Night Out (NSNO) (no date) initiative, which aims to help individuals off the streets and then to not spend a second night without a roof. The policy itself only addresses visible homelessness and less on long-term issues (McCulloch, 2015), along with a limited evidence base (Mackie et al., 2017). Being based only in England, evaluations of the NSNO (no date) services derives from particular localities (Butler et al. 2014; Turley et al., 2014). Specifically, when NSNO (no date) was implemented in Salford, it was stated that a lack of robust multiagency forum created difficulty in delivering a much-needed holistic service (Butler et al., 2015). Alongside this, many NSNO (no date) programmes, in practice, were found to support those with longer histories of rough sleeping with higher levels of support needed than anticipated (Hough et al., 2011). Further issues which were raised surrounded the attainability of temporary accommodation as an obstruction for full execution of the service, with agencies who access said accommodation not being connected up with the NSNO (no date) service, elucidating the space exists but is not being used efficiently (Turley et al., 2014). Additionally, local authorities criticised eligibility criteria of NSNO (no date) as countless rough sleepers do not meet the strict criteria of being new on the streets, nor having spent long enough to be classified as entrenched and therefore qualifying for a different programme (Mackie et al., 2017). Thus, indicating the policy is not working as intended. Another policy applied to tackling homelessness is Making Every Contact Count (MECC) (no date), which focuses on prevention more generally as opposed to only rough sleeping. The policy considers homelessness as relating to skills deficit (McCulloch, 2015) and implies homeless individuals lives are off-track and in need of rebuilding in order to have a second chance (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). A study conducted by Nelson et al. (2013) on MECC (no date) implementation found potential to deliver a cheap extra public health resource in an assortment of contexts. However, a fundamental barrier resulted from opposing objectives of numerous professional bodies, specifically within the National Health Service

(NHS), possibly due to different cultural assumptions regarding the assumed role of health professionals – treating versus preventing. The research findings suggest working conjunctively with various groups in diverse ways to modify MECC (no date) to specific needs. But, the study also comments that MECC (no date) acts largely as an advisory and signposting instrument to specific health advice and treatment, meaning it should be used as a wider follow-up service. This suggests the policy holds potential to influence homelessness rates through direction to more specific and individualised treatment, but it does need refining and reforming to reach full capability.

A theory explaining how homelessness is formed and a possible solution for it derives through a branch in Bulmer's (1969) symbolic interactionism which formed Spector and Kitsuse (1973) Constructivist Theory. Constructivism can be employed to study social issues and uses power to solve them, with constructivists viewing social issues to be generated by particular groups in society possessing power to identify and define a phenomenon as a social problem which needs addressing (Ravenhill, 2003). This theory can be applied to explain homelessness because Hutson and Clapham (1999) state homelessness did not exist as a concept until the government began to intervene towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by terming homelessness and giving it status as a social issue. The way a social issue is defined leads to how policy is constructed and how organisations are formed to tackle the issue (Jacobs et al., 1999). The issue derives from the definition of a social problem not being a stable concept, as other organisations or individuals with power can alter the definition and change the nature and functions of how formed organisations tackle the problem (Ravenhill, 2003). Jacobs et al. (1999) uses this theory as an explanation for changes in legislation, policy and sector responses. But ironically, as a theory of homelessness, its limitation derives from ignoring the individual and grouping homeless individuals together into labelled groups that have been classified by the organisations that created it (Ravenhill, 2003). This supports the notion of the importance of an internationally agreed upon definition so subjective definition variety ceases and becomes objective and universal.

Consequently, this forms the argument that true implementation effects and outcomes attempting to tackle homelessness may only be known through the opinion and experience of sector workers who encounter its progression because of the lack of regular checks and evaluations. However, until there is a universally accepted definition accepted by all, homeless individuals may never receive adequate help as figures will never truly be known, so effective and suitable implementation may not reach its full potential. A prominent and important reason for conducting this research is to attempt to fill the literature gap regarding providing perspective on how sector workers interpret their interactions in the sector, furthering O'Neil and colleagues (2017) notion about how those working in the homeless sector understand and view homelessness in different ways and may form previously unthought of solutions. This, therefore, produces the research aims looking at if the current policies and legislation in place are dealing with the homeless population adequately, to see what more could be done to reduce the homeless population and how to prevent homelessness.

## **Methodology**

### **Design and Procedure**

A descriptive research design was employed to explore this social issue because competent description can challenge assumptions and provoke action (de Vaus, 2001). From this, the projects epistemological underpinnings derived from an essentialist method, reporting simply the experiences, meaning and reality of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, a qualitative approach was selected for data collection to allow rich description of complex phenomena, holding value for studies looking at policy making, implementation and consequences (Sofaer, 1999).

Raw data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the most commonly used qualitative research technique (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006) and used in policy research (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for examining perceptions and opinions (Barriball and While, 1994), a core aim of this research project, allowing for flexibility to address important aspects of participants views for deeper understanding of the research question (Miles and Gilbert, 2005) and the expert knowledge of the individual (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). An agenda was created beforehand, known as an Interview Schedule (Appendix 1), outlining planned topics and particular questions to be addressed (Adams, 2015). Through employing open and closed questions, accompanied by follow-up questions (Adams, 2015), the questions were well formulated and plainly worded (Åstedt-Kurki and Keikkinen, 1994; Turner, 2010) - aiming to generate unique (Krauss et al., 2009), in-depth and vivid (Dearnley, 2005) responses. Because of this, the investigation approach used inductive and deductive reasoning methods because semi-structured interviews allow for both (Reyes et al., 2018). However, the research primarily encompassed inductive reasoning because arguments based on experiences are best articulated inductively (Trochim, 2006).

Thematic Analysis was chosen for data analysis primarily because of its theoretical freedom, providing flexibility and permitting rich and detailed accounts of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis identifies, analyses and reports themes within data, emphasising similarities and differences across data sets, engendering unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified at a semantic level, taking the surface meaning of responses (Boyatzis, 1998), and follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide consisting of 6 phases. The first consisted of transcribing and familiarisation of data by repeatedly reading to generate preliminary ideas. Following this, production of initial codes by coding noteworthy data systematically and assembling relevant data to each code occurred. Next, these codes were collated into potential themes, whilst simultaneously gathering more relevant data for each theme. The fourth phase required reviewing themes by examining compatibility with coded extracts and the full data corpus. The penultimate phase entailed defining and labelling these themes, followed by the final phase selecting final extracts for the analysis. This was not a linear process, requiring alternating between the data throughout. A final

production of the report was produced, linking back to analysis of the research question and literature.

The procedure was initiated with research regarding general homelessness whilst concurrently creating and passing relevant documents needed for the project through ethical clearance. Next, a letter was sent to the gatekeeper (Appendix 2) to grant permission for researching on the premises. Once granted, the study was advertised using a recruitment poster (Appendix 3) that was left in an accessible place within the organisations building, alongside copies of the participant information sheet (Appendix 4) giving more detail and allowing participants to read in their own time. Further advertisement was made through an online post on the organisations internal page stating the information on the recruitment poster (Appendix 3), including contact details. Participants showing initial verbal interest gave their email and were contacted, whilst other participants chose to contact the researcher directly to organise an interview when convenient for them, all on an individual and personal basis. On the day of the face-to-face interview, the participant was met at the organisations building at the agreed time and taken to a private room to minimise distractions (Harrell and Bradley, 2009) for an interview lasting up to an hour - a reasonable maximum length of time, minimising fatigue for both parties involved (Adams, 2015). Before starting to record the interview, participants were given another copy of the participant information sheet (Appendix 4) and asked to read it, alongside signing 2 consent forms (Appendix 5) – a copy for the participant and researcher - if they still wished to participate. If agreed and relevant documents were given and signed, the interview began recording on a voice memo app on the researchers phone, whilst the researcher began to follow the interview schedule (Appendix 1). Once all questions asked and any relevant information followed up, the interview stopped recording and the participants were debriefed and given a debrief sheet (Appendix 6), making sure they understood all elements and aims of the research, and ensuring they left in the same mental state as arriving in. The participants were asked to each create a unique identifier code on their debrief sheet (Appendix 6), with a copy written down by the interviewer on their copy of the participants consent form. The interview was immediately transcribed on a laptop and then permanently removed off the researchers phone onto an encrypted laptop file, along with a scanned copy of the consent form, which was then physically destroyed. Once final submission of the project occurred, only one copy of the final submission remained for the participants if they wished to have a copy.

Quality criteria was based around Lincoln and Guba's (1985) posit in producing a trustworthy research study. Credibility was gained through prolonged engagement in the field with the participants, devoting appropriate time and becoming accustomed with the environment and context to assess for misinformation, whilst coincidentally building trust and rapport (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Credibility was further upheld through persistent observation, a technique ensuring depth of experience and understanding, allowing focus on relevant and irrelevant features (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Furthermore, confirmability was gained through a reflexive account, understanding the extent the findings were shaped by the participants and not the researcher (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).



## Participants and Sampling

Qualitative samples tend to be small because the rich data is bulky (Emmel, 2013), so a sample size between 4 to 8 is appropriate for collecting in-depth interviews (Hair et al., 1998). The project comprised of 4 participants, all found through homogeneous purposive sampling because the research focused on a particular sub-group which have similar characteristics, allowing for exploration at a deeper level with minor differences becoming apparent (Symon and Cassell, 2012). Voluntary sampling was also employed because those who volunteered were recruited (Setia, 2016). All participants were above 18 varying in ages, alongside a mixture of genders and all based in the North West region whilst volunteering or working within the same organisation. The participants roles within the organisation ranged, from a senior liaison officer to one of the founders of the organisation. Other demographic information was not collected because it was not needed nor deemed appropriate for the project. Interview length varied between participants, ranging from 20 minutes to 1 hour. The inclusion criteria stated participants needed to have been working or volunteering within the homeless sector for at least 1 month, allowing a standardised minimum experience. The only exclusion criteria stated participants needed a working email to organise the interview through.

## Ethics

Before the research was initiated, ethical clearance was granted through Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) Ethics Online System and standards followed The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics (2018). Informed consent was gained from every participant because the research's true aims were evident and transparent throughout as no deception was needed. All participants were above 18, with no one classed as vulnerable, so informed consent was gained directly through written means. There were two consent forms (Appendix 5) signed, a copy for the participant and the researcher. The researcher's copy was scanned immediately and held in an encrypted folder, whilst the physical copy was destroyed. Consent was also given for permission to record the interview and how the data would be stored. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw throughout, and the procedure to do so, as it was stated on the recruitment poster (Appendix 3) and participant information sheet (Appendix 4). It was also stated on an email organising the interview and detailed with specific withdrawal dates on the debrief sheet. The participants were debriefed immediately after the interview finished and ceased recording, which was also done if the participants displayed any sign of distress. The debrief sheet (Appendix 6) stated relevant and appropriate sources of contact information, ranging from charities accessible through various platforms to the researcher's Dissertation Supervisor. The debrief sheet (Appendix 6) made the research intent transparent, and the researcher made sure the participant left the interview in the same frame of mind when they entered. Confidentiality was upheld through adhering to MMU ethical framework guidelines. It was also maintained through participants organising their interviews directly via email through private contact, with only the researcher knowing who initiated participation. Once the relevant recruitment documents were distributed, the study was not discussed, so discretion was maintained. The interviews were conducted on days where participants were already scheduled to be at the building, meaning others would not know they were being interviewed because it was not out of place.

This was also maintained through the researcher, as they did not have a regular attending day, so they were not out of place either. After the interview, participants created pseudonyms, which their data was referred to from that point on and upheld confidentiality through removing identifiable information from the transcripts.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

Overall, 3 distinct themes were identified within the data corpus from the interviews. The first concerns 'current government policies and legislation are failing'. The second theme explored 'self-recognition' within those impacted by homelessness, and the final theme found 'connected services' to be a large influence on tackling homelessness.

### **'Current government policies and legislation are failing'**

A prominent theme found across the data corpus identified that the current government's stance on homelessness, through policies and legislation, are failing because "it's a broken system" (W05OF, line 109) where "[the government] make these legislations but they don't know what they're talking about" (D12PR, line 92-93) – arguing homelessness to be "directly their [Conservative government's] fault" (J01EA, line 67).

One participant bluntly stated, "the current policies aren't working – if they were we wouldn't have people on the streets" (W05OF, line 130-131), supporting the notion that policies like NSNO (no date) do not produce intended outcomes. An explanation for this derives from McCulloch's evaluation (2015) that the policy only tackles visible homelessness. However, another participant stated since commuting to Manchester they have "seen at least triple the amount of people on the streets" (J01EA, line 54-55), suggesting the NSNO (no date) policy does not work tackling visible homelessness either because "visually the policies aren't working" (J01EA, line 45). This is possibly explained through the strict criteria met with NSNO (no date) explored by Mackie et al. (2017), further demonstrating the policy does not work in practice as expected and arguably foreshadowing the Homelessness Code of Guidance (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018) because it provides less information on providing good practice (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). This further supports Lipsky (1980) and McCulloch (2015) in the importance of interpretation for homeless sector workers and supports the argument that the homeless population are not receiving adequate help because current policies like NSNO (no date) do not relieve homelessness.

However, it can be contended the homeless population do receive a form of help, but it is not adequate because it needs refining and reforming to be successful. This is supported through the MECC (no date) policy, displaying capability to signpost individuals towards more specific treatments for health improvements, but possessing cultural assumptions when implemented (Nelson et al., 2013). This is furthered through lack of a universal definition distorting true figures, meaning "local

authorities are funded based on the numbers, and they're unrealistic numbers, so they don't get enough funding" (W05OF, line 113-115), creating an on-going cycle. Busch-Geertsema (no date) supports this, stating those responsible for policies underestimate the extent of an issue. Withal, because "[policy makers] don't understand where we [sector workers] struggle" (D12PR, line 87-88), it emphasises the gap in UK literature concerning service providers understandings and interactions (McCulloch, 2015), expediting the importance for this research to be conducted.

Therefore, this theme addresses the research aim of 'are the current policies and legislation dealing with the homeless population sufficiently?' Arguing, they are not sufficiently managing and stopping homelessness. Only through research, reform and refining can the policies and legislation reach full potential to then adequately help the homeless population because currently they do not.

### **'Self-recognition'**

Another eminent theme arising from data analysis was self-recognition that one is at risk of becoming homeless, arguing the homeless population will only receive adequate help if they understand they are at risk, seeking and accepting it before being declared homeless.

Specifically, if "people recognise it [becoming homeless] within themselves that they're at risk" (J05AH, line 169-170) and by "providing safe opportunities for people to say, 'I'm at risk here'" (J05AH, line 168-169), it could incentivise applicants to engage in steps of prevention to reduce personal cost (Crisis, 2015). This would be addressed through notions such as "do people recognise, for example, when they're getting into debt or when their debts are spiralling" (J05AH, line 175-176), and pursuing assistance if they do.

A particular interviewee addressed the concept of seeking aid, but emphasised not having the help go directly to them:

"I think the most important thing is the ownership should be on the individual getting access to support, not the support going to them all the time. We should be putting the power back into their hands and supporting them to lobby themselves" (W05OF, line 254-257).

This possibly addresses the research aim of 'what could be done to prevent homelessness' through an individual seeking help and preventing their own risk of homelessness.

However, it is arguable that becoming homeless goes beyond the individual regardless of whether they recognise it within themselves, meaning they are not adequately receiving help because society also influences homelessness. This is supported through James Brokenshire's comment regarding the Conservative party policies facilitating homelessness (Marsh, 2018), and lending support to the previous theme.

This is further reinforced through stigma, because “there is huge stigma around homelessness, a lot of people don’t want to admit they’re getting into problems” (J05AH, line 21-22), meaning they may not seek help in a preventable situation. This is supported through Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), which predicts social behaviours through intention to perform a behaviour that can be predicted through attitudes and subjective norms. When applied to homelessness, this theory can predict an individual’s likelihood to use services, so if their attitude around receiving help is influenced through negative stigma, they will not seek help. This contests the homeless population will not receive adequate help because stigma within society prevents them seeking it, so until stigma is eradicated this cycle will continue.

Consequently, although the individual can reduce the chances of becoming homeless in some situations by recognising it within themselves, it is also a societal issue that goes beyond the individual.

### **‘Having connected services’**

The final theme found within the data corpus emphasised the need for having a holistic approach across services to tackle homelessness - arguing the homeless population do not currently receive adequate help but they would with a holistic unified system.

Arguably, the most influential way to reduce and prevent homelessness is through “having a holistic wrap around service” (J05AH, line 59), because “they [organisations] work in isolation” (J05AH, line 160) where “everybody has a piece of the jigsaw and they don’t piece it all together” (J05AH, line 161-162). Forming this holistic service is supported by research from Homeless Link (2018) and by the NSNO (no date) evaluation in Salford, commenting that a multiagency forum is needed (Butler et al., 2015). These agencies would include “mental health services and benefit advice” (W05OF, line 198-199), to cover a range of services. Specifically, because “there are so many layers” (J01EA, line 101) a holistic approach would “look at all those layers” (J01EA, line 103) and would also ensure limited capital is more effectively targeted (Crisis, 2015) to “strip out the waste” (J05AH, line 293), and to “review and better channel resources” (J05AH, line 83). This intrinsic layering is supported by Nelson and colleagues (2013) evaluation of MECC (no date), which indicated the policy be used to signpost more specific treatment and follow-ups. Thus, indicating having a connected service regime would make these layers more compatible and create fluency, allowing the tailoring of specific needs and ensuring the homeless population receive adequate help because it would be specialised.

Furthermore, alongside having these connected services between sector organisations, the same could be argued for forming a direct relationship between policy and legislation makers and those on ‘the front line’ :

“the pressure is coming down and none of the information seems to be getting to the decision makers and to the top of the boards” (W05OF, line 133).

This “one-way street” (W05OF, line 134) creates “discord between real decision makers and the ones on the front line” (W05OF, line 137-138). Arguably, a possible solution for this would be to support the establishment of a Homelessness Reduction Board suggested by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). Doing so would permit responsibility for reducing and preventing homelessness in that specific area. The board members would consist of a mixture of positions, including a seat for front line sector workers and democratically elected figures, and would arguably influence homelessness because it holds the potential be the central location for these organisations to also collaborate. This idea is also supported by a particular participant from this project, because:

“it’s important people that have been homeless are part of the solution because you have to speak to the people that have direct experiences mixed with those on the outside that know about policy” (J01EA, line 199-202).

By doing so “the councils use the knowledge and experience of people on the front line” (J05AH, line 435-436), which they would not normally gain because “they’re surrounded by likeminded people that say yes to them” (W05OF, line 155-156), which argues the homeless population would only then receive adequate help because a mixed approach using multiple viewpoints would find the best and most effective solutions.

Thus, arguing the homeless population do not currently receive adequate help because working in isolation wastes resources and limits potential, but by creating a connected service system there would be prospect of adequately helping the homeless population. This theme also answers and supports both research questions of how to reduce and prevent homelessness.

### **Concluding remarks**

To conclude, through the viewpoint of those working in the homeless sector coinciding with literature research, it is contested the homeless population currently do not receive adequate help because the social phenomenon is still prominent and seemingly unchanging. However, by establishing connected services there is great potential to provide a wraparound provision to cover all needs of the homeless, arguably reducing current figures and preventing homelessness, which would adequately help the homeless population through all their needs being met. Future research recommendations would be to conduct more high-quality evaluations and progression checks to ensure all efforts are made to tackle homelessness effectively, and without waste, to ensure it does not continue in the future.

## **Reflexive Analysis**

Reflexivity consists of self-awareness (Lambert et al., 2010), permitting for the researcher to acknowledge their part in the world they study (Ackerly and True, 2010) and allowing introspection on the subjectivity within the research process (Parahoo, 2006). Reflexivity contributes to transparency (Jootun et al., 2009), being an empowering and iterative process looking at the internal and external influences of the researcher (Palanganas et al., 2017).

Following Gibb's (1988) account for reflexivity, my role as a researcher allowed me to explore the concept of homelessness through interviewing sector workers. This involved volunteering with a homeless charity in Manchester, which led to conducting 4 interviews exploring an array of topics surrounding homelessness. I chose this topic because it is a preventable social issue not being dealt with and I decided on a certain charity because of its well-known influence and presence in the Manchester community for tackling homelessness.

As this topic can be sensitive, I was very cautious my regarding feelings and emotions and those of the participants throughout the research. During the research I felt a huge degree of fulfilment in my part for attempting to make a positive influence within my community. Initially, I felt nervous before commencing the interview process because I had no sense of what was forthcoming, but once the first interview was completed I then felt more experienced and prepared after the next one. I believe those I interviewed felt comfortable and at ease because, through prolonged engagement, they became confident around me, and I still feel this way because I continue to regularly volunteer with the organisation. As a researcher, I also consciously took steps to minimise any form of guilt or pressure to participate. This was key because I had prolonged engagement in the participants environment before initiating the research and did not want to apply pressure in any form at any time, so once the relevant documents were distributed it was not discussed – unless they wanted to participate.

One positive aspect of this research project that went well was that the experience allowed me to become part of an influential organisation helping to tackle an important cause. Additionally, it helped me grow and mature whilst continuously educating me. I believe the positive experiences gained were because the type of people involved were naturally more accepting of me and open because of their line of work. However, the main issue I encountered was attaining participants. I initially planned to interview 6 homeless sector workers but only got 4. I had over the initial needed amount show interest, but cancellations were common. A possible explanation for this is because this particular organisation only runs during evenings, so those who work full time and come to the organisation after work had a very limited amount of free time. By undertaking this research project, I have learned about myself and concluded how complex and damning the issue of homelessness is. In the future, the skills I would need to handle a research such as this would be initial confidence to ensure gaining the required time to ensure gathering detailed responses. This is because my first interview lasted 20 minutes because nerves were apparent for both parties involved. However, after the first interview finished the other interviews hit the intended longer interview time. To handle a similar situation better, I would make sure to show confidence and be fully

prepared, so data gathered from my participant is fully explored and a sufficient amount of data is gathered. I would also make my communication skills stronger in promoting the research primarily to gain more participant numbers required as soon as to avoid not reaching intended numbers. If I conducted this project again, I would like to try to gather a range of participants from all over England to allow for comparison in different regions, as homelessness differs throughout different locations.

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